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Study Finds U.S. Weak Reacting to Shah's Fall

Lack of Policy Cited During Iran Turmoil

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A detailed new study of the fall of the shah and the takeover of Iran by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, based on interviews with a number of key U.S. and Iranian officials, concludes that "the Carter administration had not ever really formulated a policy, established objectives, or designed tactics to deal with the Iranian crisis."

State Department policymakers who felt Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi had to go "never got a single serious initiative off the ground" to guide the situation toward a desirable result, while the National Security Council "could not offer any practical alternative" to keep him or some moderate successor in power, the study says.

It was published today in *The Washington Quarterly*, which is issued by the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University. The study was written by the quarterly's editor, Michael A. Ledeen, and William H. Lewis, a professor in the George Washington University's Institute for Sino-Soviet Studies.

According to other sources, the authors interviewed Americans who played critical roles in Iranian affairs both in Washington and Tehran during the period from September 1978 until February 1979, when Khomeini returned home in triumph from exile near Paris. The authors also interviewed several Iranians involved at a high level.

But to protect their informants, the authors do not name them, nor do they give specific sources for new information or for evaluations.

The study's conclusions amount to a scathing critique of President Carter's handling of what the authors call his first crisis. They say that his administration had introduced "a more informal style of government (that) did not serve him well."

"But with the stakes so high, and the crisis so clear by the late autumn (of 1978), one would have expected some clear definition of American interest, some leadership for the foreign policy community, some instruction to his top advisers," Ledeen and Lewis write.

"This never took place," they conclude.

Their critique is expected by political observers here who are familiar with it to contribute to a gathering controversy over "Who lost Iran?" The hostage situation in Tehran has muted any political dispute so far, but it is gradually developing.

Ledeen and Lewis say that the shah was under medication for cancer during 1978 and, as a result, was "unexpectedly passive, introspective and withdrawn." Fearing potential rivals, he had eliminated anyone with authority who could make hard assessments and carry out difficult assignments.

As a result, the growing political turmoil in Iran found the shah "not likely to take strong and independent action during the crisis."

He was also deterred from action by Carter's human rights policy, the study says. State Department human rights reports implicitly condemned his regime, and the department blocked shipments of tear gas canisters that the shah wanted to deal with growing street demonstrations.

The study pictures a sharp split between the State Department and the National Security Council under Zbigniew Brzezinski.

The NSC "and Brzezinski in particular believed that the nature of the shah's regime was a distinctly secondary question" to keeping in friendly hands a country vital for U.S. interests. But the State Department, especially Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance and his Iran desk officer, Henry Precht, "was eager to establish that the old Kissingerian geopolitical view of the world had been abandoned in favor of a more moralistic approach," the study says.

Other potentially important players did little, it says. Defense

Secretary Harold Brown never took a strong position, and CIA Director Stanfield Turner took cautious positions while never calling the situation desperate.

At the same time, both officials in Washington and senior diplomats at the U.S. embassy in Tehran held two important beliefs, Ledeen and Lewis say. One was that Khomeini was a moderate, "a somewhat eccentric but basically admirable dissident." The other was that moderate, Westernized members of the old National Front in the Iranian opposition would dominate any post-shah situation — not the Moslem clerics.

While Brzezinski was telephoning the shah in the autumn of 1978 with assurances of strong U.S. backing, including support for a tough military government to quell unrest, the State Department experts had concluded that the shah had outlived his usefulness, the study says.

The experts felt the shah's "continued presence was inflammatory and the only acceptable solution to the conflict in Iran was the creation of a more 'progressive' government" by National Front-type leaders.

The shah was perplexed. When he asked for cabled confirmations of Brzezinski's line, the State Department cut them off, Ledeen and Lewis write.

With Precht and the U.S. ambassador in Tehran, William H. Sullivan, taking a pessimistic line, "while Brzezinski was seeking ways to bolster the shah's resolve and demonstrate American reliability," Brzezinski cut the State Department out of most consultations, the study says. Although Vance attended White House meetings, the department was left with little more than administrative problems like evacuating American civilians from Iran.

Brzezinski wanted a high-level mission sent to Tehran to make it clear to Iranian military leaders that the United States was prepared to see force used. But this idea turned into the visit by Air Force Gen. Robert E. Huyser, which the study says had the opposite effect of obscuring any decisive steps.